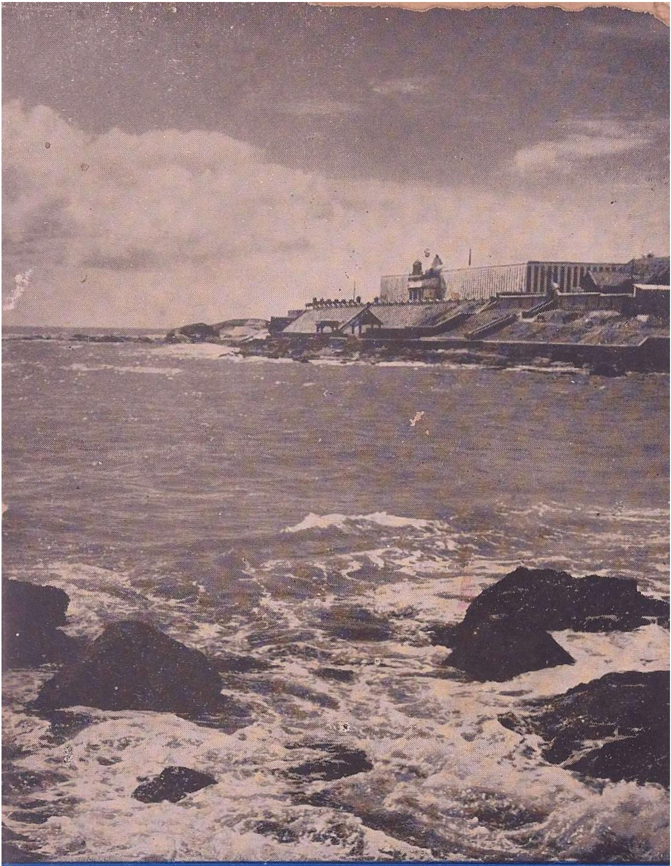

KANYAKUMARI

The memorable moments which you have spent at

KANYAKUMARI

can be made a permanent part of your aesthetic and spiritual sensibility if you possess a copy of this booklet.

In these pages you have a lucid account of history and legends connected with

KANYAKUMARI

and

SUCHINDRUM

temples illustrated with eloquent photoplates which speak to you about the sanctity and the unique scenic beauty of the

LAND'S END OF INDIA

E-UN-40

KANYAKUMARI

★

By
"SUKU"

★

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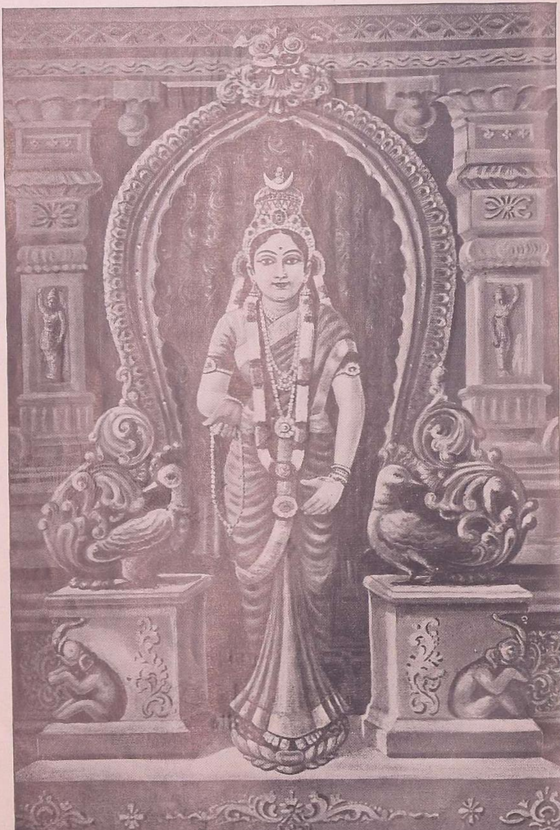


The Virgin Goddess of Kanyakumari

KANYAKUMARI

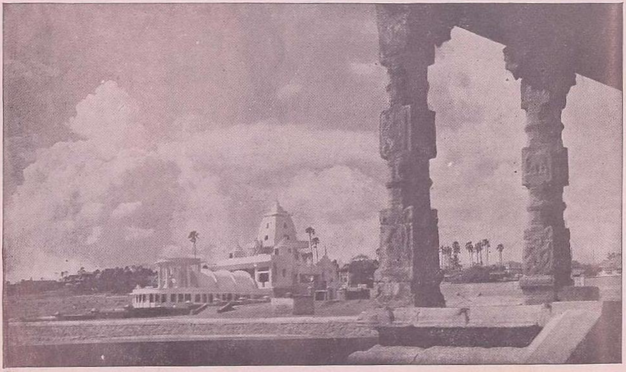
Kanyakumari is one of the few places in the world which leave indelible impressions on the memory of a visitor. Apart from the fact that it is one of the most entrancingly beautiful places in India, it is also one of the holiest pilgrim centres of the country. It is the Land's End of India, where one may stand on the shore and watch the sun rise from the Bay of Bengal and set in the Arabian Sea. Hundreds of tourists and pilgrims of every creed and conviction, visit the place to bathe in the holy waters of the ocean and to offer worship at the sacred shrine or

Sunrise at the Bay of Bengal

to enjoy the superb scenic beauty of the place and to pay homage to the Father of the Nation at the recently built Gandhi Smarak Mandir.

This Cape from which the newly formed district of Kanyakumari takes its name is washed by three Seas: on the east by the Bay of Bengal, on the south by the Indian Ocean and on the west by the Arabian Sea. It is celebrated for its, shrine dedicated to Goddess Parasakthi, and hence it is known and reverenced throughout India. It seems that there is an injunction in the Hindu Sacred Scriptures

Majestic Memorial to the Mahatma

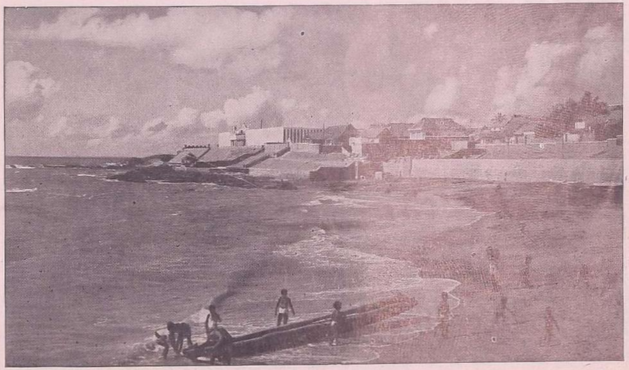


that persons who had been to Banaras, must have darshan of the Virgin Goddess of Kanyakumari.

History and Tradition

Kanyakumari forms part of Nanjinad which was the southernmost part of the erstwhile Travancore State. According to a legend, it was Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who reclaimed the land now called Kerala, from the ocean, from Goa to Kanyakumari. The story goes that when the warrior king Parasurama wanted to give land in charity to Brahmins, he prevailed upon Varuna,

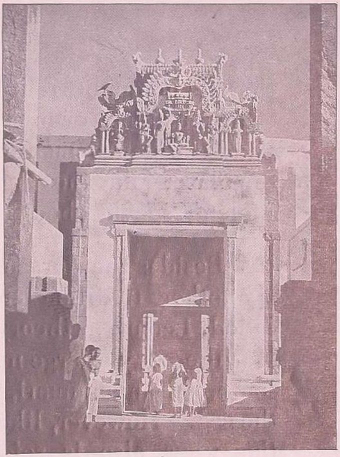
Confluence of the three seas



the God of the Sea, to grant him permission to hurl his battle axe into the waters. The axe, which was hurled from Goa, fell at Kanyakumari, and immediately the water receded, leaving all the land now called Kerala. This is, of course, legend and not history. The historians say that for centuries this Nanjinad was under the sway of Pandya kings, who ruled over vast territories in Tamilnad. It is evident from the architecture of the place and the manners and customs of the people that Tamil influence was uppermost in the area. The temples particularly are of Tamil design. There is positive historical evidence to show that the village

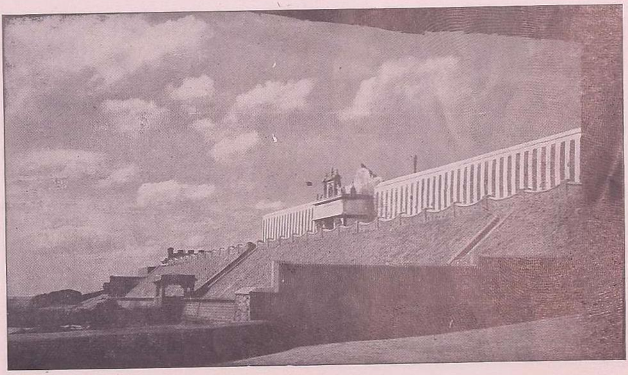
The Bathing ghat

Kanyakumari formed part of the Pandya kingdom for a very long time. Some of the Tamil Sangam works including Purananooru refer to the fact that the Goddess Kumari was in fact worshipped as the family deity of the Pandya kings. However,



The Entrance to the Temple

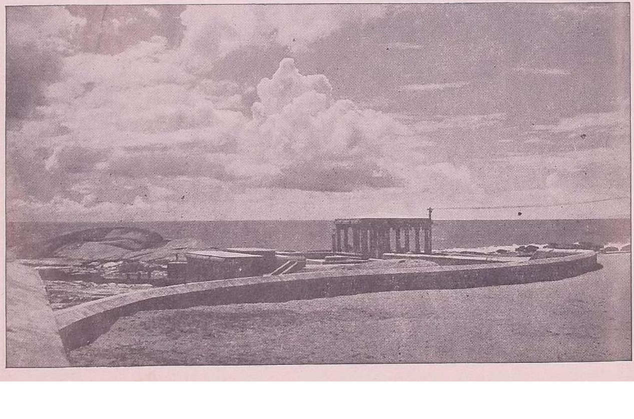
The Temple - Cape comorin



there is no doubt that Kanyakumari was a famous place even centuries back. The Hindu Puranas mention the holiness of the place, and the ancient Greek writer Ptolemy speaks about it as a harbour.

Besides the Parasurama legend, there is another tradition embodied in the so called Lemurian theory which maintains that there lay a large mass of land to the south of Kanyakumari, later swallowed by the sea. However, like the other legend, this view also is rejected by the historians.

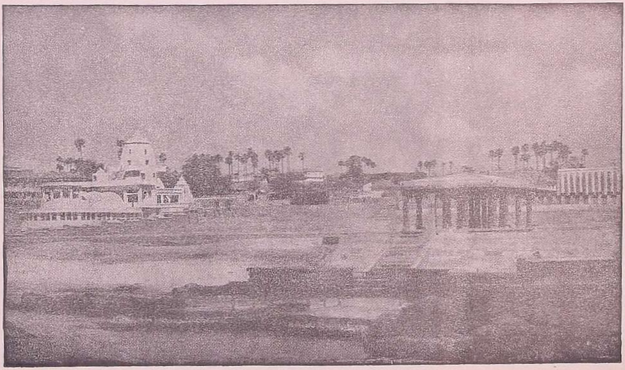
The Tapering Tip



The Sthalapurana

The main source of the legends connected with the temple at Kanyakumari is the Sthalapurana. The Sthalapurana as well as that of Suchindrum claims that it is part of the famous Skandapurana. Legends and folklore cannot be faithful guides to the students of history, but it is unfair and unnecessary to be hypercritical about them. Studious and keen eyes may find scattered grains of historical truth here and there. It must be remembered that these Sthalapuranas were written to exalt the divinity or

The Three in one - Thirtha Temple Mandir



"By the deep sea and the music in its roar"

Mandir by night

sanctity of the particular temples. Perhaps the creators of the legends wanted to expound some philosophical and ethical truths like efficacy of devotion or triumph of chastity.

India, as is widely accepted, derived its name Bharat, from the famous legendary monarch Bharata, who ruled over the country centuries back. He had eight sons and a daughter. The name of the daughter was Kumari. When king Bharata decided to retire, he divided his kingdom into nine parts and gave a part to each of his nine children. The southernmost part of the country fell to the share of Kumari. From that time onwards this place came to be called Kumari. To this place the Goddess Parasakthi came to do penance. It is believed that it was Parasurama, who installed the deity here. The temple, as can be seen from various inscriptions, was later built by Pandya kings.

The Legend of the Virgin Goddess

Once upon a time, in this world the Asuras got supremacy over the Devas. Dharma declined and Adharma reared its ugly head. All kinds of vices and sins

flourished. Ignorance and injustice ruled the roost. The chastity of womenfolk was violated. Banasura, the king of demons, was working havoc in the three worlds. He drove away the Devas from heaven and meted out cruel punishments to saints and rishis. The agonised Mother Earth sought the help of Lord Vishnu, the Protector of the Universe, to destroy the forces of evil which were desecrating the entire world. Vishnu said that the Devas should propitiate Parasakthi, who alone was capable of destroying Banasura. Accordingly the Devas performed a great yagna to propitiate the great Goddess. Finally Parasakthi appeared before them and promised that she would restore order and righteousness in the world by annihilating the evil forces headed by Banasura. She immediately came to Kumari in the form of a virgin girl and began to do penance. In due course she attained the marriageable age and arrangements were made for her marriage with Lord Siva (of the Suchindrum temple) who had fallen in love with her. Narada, the divine sage, realised that this marriage would destroy the chances of the annihilation of Banasura, because it was preordained

by Brahma that the demon king could be killed only by a virgin. Narada began to devise ways and means to frustrate this marriage proposal. He met both the Goddess Kanya and Lord Siva, expressed his joy at the proposed union and asked them to prepare for marriage which was to take place at an auspicious hour at mid-night on a particular day. Overjoyed at the prospect of his cherished desire being fulfilled, Lord Siva started for Kanyakumari, eager not to miss the auspicious hour. But when he reached Vazhukkamparai, a place three miles south of Suchindrum, Narada assumed the form of a cock, crowed loudly and thus falsely heralded the break of dawn. Thinking that the auspicious hour was past, Lord Siva returned to Suchindrum and remained there. The Goddess decided to remain a virgin ever after. All the various foods prepared for the wedding feast were turned into sands. That is why small pebbles, quite like rice, are found abundantly on the coast and why there are so many varieties of coloured sand in evidence.

Banasura heard about the beauty of the virgin and came to see her. For

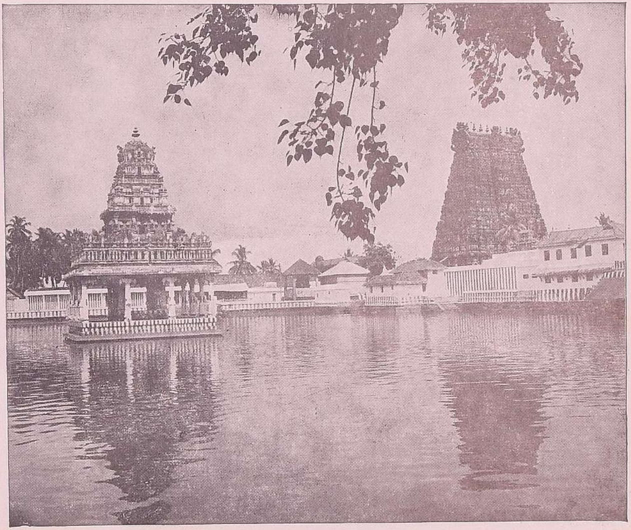
him it was love at first sight and he requested her hand in marriage. When the Goddess pooh poohed the idea, he decided to win her by force and drew forth his mighty sword. The Goddess was, after all, expecting this moment of provocation and she also unsheathed her deadly sword. Both fought fiercely for a long time. In the end, the Goddess killed the powerful demon with her Chakrayudha. All the Devas expressed their gratitude to the Goddess who blessed them. After the departure of the Devas, the Goddess Parasakthi began to continue her interrupted penance.

The annual Navarathri festival in October is conducted to commemorate this annihilation of Banasura by Parasakthi. The deity is taken in a procession from the temple to Mahadanapuram, a village two miles north of Kanyakumari. The war between the demon king and the Goddess is enacted by the pujarins. This is called Parivettai. Probably this is a symbolic representation of the war which goes on in human mind between the forces of evil and those of goodness.

The Suchindrum Temple

Because Suchindrum is very near to Kanyakumari and the deity there is Shiva, the husband of Sakthi, legends and local traditions have connected the two temples. The Suchindrum temple is very rich in tradition and puranic lore. The temple derives its sanctity and importance not only from the fact that Brahma,

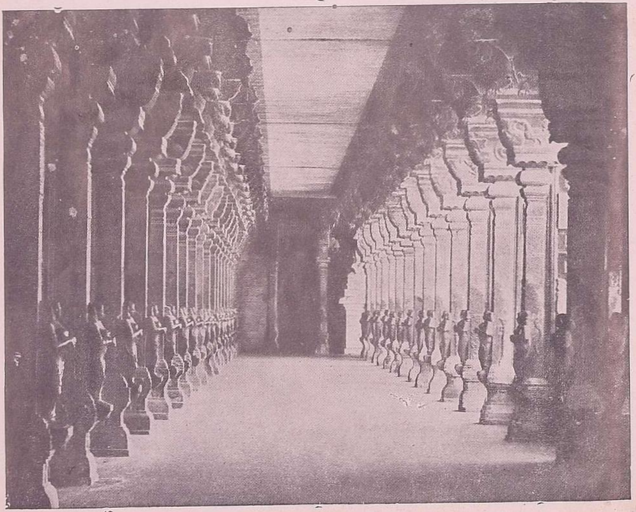
Suchindrum Temple and Tank



Vishnu and Maheswara-the Three Principal Gods of the Hindu pantheon-are all worshipped here but also from an immemorial tradition that Indra himself worshipped and still worships every night Lord Shiva, installed in the temple.

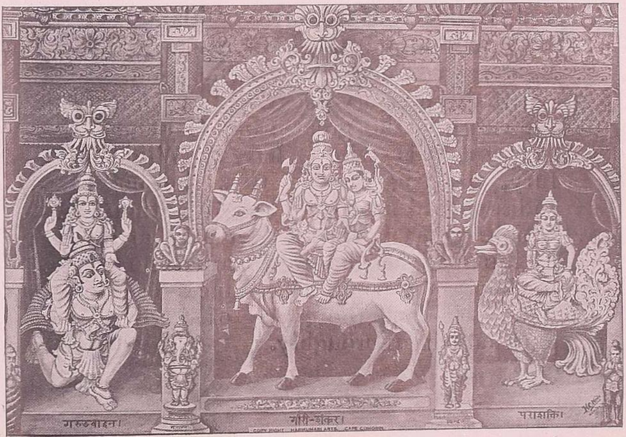
The Great Sage Atri and his wife Anasuya, renowned for her chastity, were doing penance in a hermitage at Gnanaranya (the former name of Suchindrum).

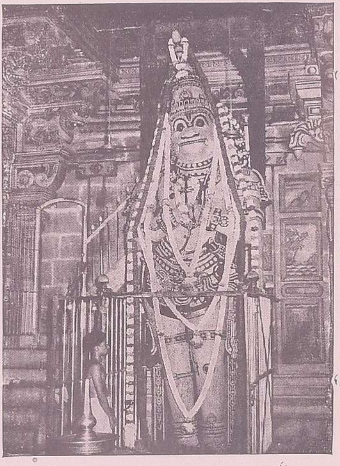
Corridor - Suchindrum Temple



One day, when Atri had gone to the Himalayas, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva wanted to test Anasuya's chastity, and disguising themselves as three brahmins, went to the hermitage and begged alms. Anasuya set about to serve them. When they were seated for their food, the Gods told her that they had taken a vow not to eat food served by a person who wore any clothing. Confident of her own purity, Anasuya sprinkled holy water on them and transformed them into three suckling babes. Then she nursed them.

Deities – Suchindrum





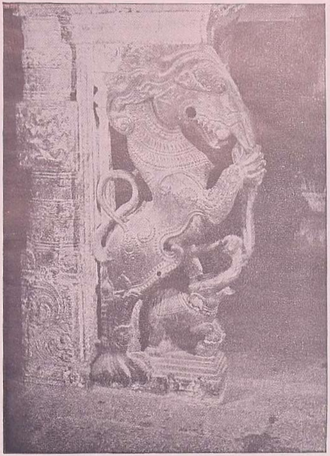
Hanuman

After sometime the wives of the Gods turned up at the hut in search of their husbands. Anasuya gave the children their original form. Anasuya, and her husband Atri, who had returned by this time, got the darshan of the Trimurthi. In commemoration of this event the temple at Suchindrum was erected and all the three Gods are worshipped there.

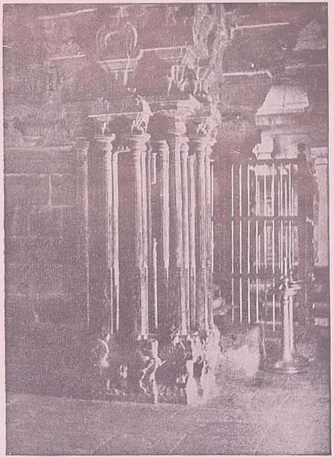
Suchindrum takes its name from God Indra, and means the place where Indra was purified. The story goes that Indra incurred the wrath of the great sage Gautama for seducing his wife Ahalya. Wild with fury, the sage cursed that the body of Indra should be covered with a thousand female genital organs. Greatly afflicted by his disgrace and misfortune, he went to Gnanaranya and did penance for a long time. At last the grace of Lord Shiva purified him thoroughly.

Venu Gopal

Siva



Mythological Dragon



Music in Stone

There is a traditional belief that the water, oil or milk poured on the Deity at Suchindrum during the abhisheka or holy bath, passess through an underground passage and reaches the ocean at Kanyakumari. This place is called the Sthanuthirtha.

The corridor in the Suchindrum temple is one of the biggest in South India. In symmetric beauty and vastness, it comes second only to the corridor of the Rameswaram temple. The huge Idol of Hanuman, the four musical pillars and the architectural beauty of certain mandapas make this temple justly famous throughout the country. The car festival in December and the festival of the float in April attract vast crowds.

The Bathing Ghats at Kanyakumari

The Sea surrounding the Kanyakumari Temple contains many holy thirtha ghats including Savitri, Gayatri, Saraswathi, Kanya, Sthanu, Mathru, Pithru and other Thirthas. The bathing ghat and the mandapa with sixteen pillars at the confluence of three seas, are of special importance. A dip in this ghat

is supposed to purify one's soul The Sangham work, Manimekalai, speaks of a woman, who having lost her chastity, came all the way from Banaras to Kanyakumari to bathe in the sea and worship the Virgin Goddess. In the Vanaparva of Mahabharata, it is said that "One should bathe in the thirtha called Kanya on the sea coast. Bathing there, one is cleansed of all sins (verse 23). And further on (verses 136-38) it is added that "going to Kanya with regulated diet and subdued mind, one reaches the region of Manu, the Lord of Creation; whatever gift is made at Kanya, the rishis of rigid vows say, is everlasting".

Annual Festivals at Kanyakumari

Apart from the Navarathri Festival in the month of October, there is a festival in the month of Visakha (May), lasting for 10 days. On these days both in the morning and at night, the deity is taken out in procession along the main streets.

The car festival is on the ninth day and on the last day is the floating festival.

The Goddess is taken in procession in the tank on a beautifully decorated Teppam or float.

Comforts and Conveniences at Kanyakumari

Good accommodation can be had at the Government choultry and the Devasthanam buildings. The cape Hotel and the Rest House, run by the Government, afford all modern conveniences.

A swimming pool, providing all the pleasures of sea bathing, with none of its risks, has been constructed on the sea front.

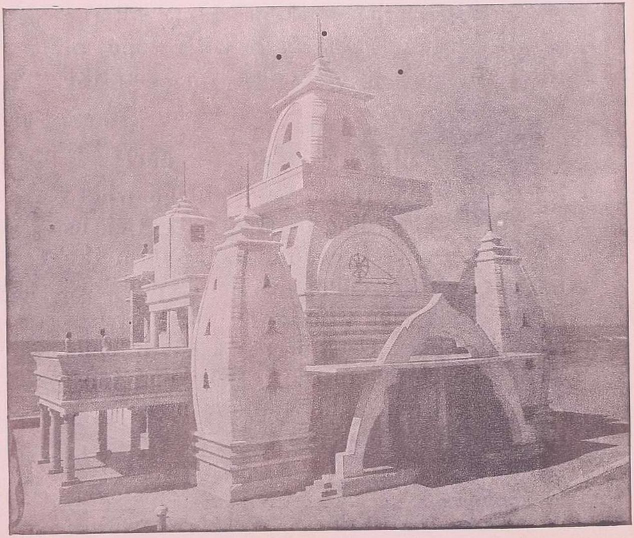
The Village of Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari is a small village whose population according to the 1961 Census is about 7000. Roman catholics form the majority of the population. They are mostly fishermen who live in small houses close to the sea coast on the eastern side. Their church-one of the biggest and most ancient churches in India–can seat a thousand worshippers.

It is said that when St. Francis Xaviour visited Kanyakumari, he stayed with these fishermen and worked among them, relieving them of their sufferings.

There is also a Moslem mosque in the village.

Gandhi Smarak Mandir



Other places of interest in and around Kanyakumari

The Gandhi Mandir

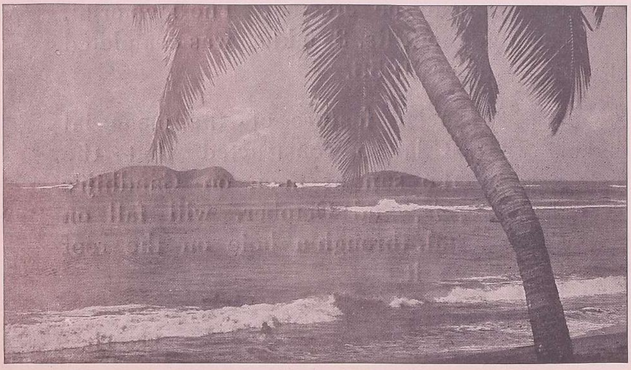
On the 12th February 1948, the mortal remains of Gandhiji were consigned to the seas at Kanyakumari. The urn containing the ashes, was placed on a pedestal, before it was deposited in the ocean. The erstwhile Travancore-Cochin Government decided to erect a memorial at the place, as a humble tribute to the Father of the Nation. On the 20th June 1954, Acharya Kripalani, one of the foremost exponents of Gandhian philosophy, laid the foundation stone of the memorial to be erected. The memorial, costing about Rs. 3 lakhs, was completed in October 1956.

A special feature of the memorial is, that it is so constructed that the rays of the sun at noon on Gandhiji's birthday, *ie.* 2nd October, will fall on the pedestal, through a hole on the roof just above it.

The Vivekananda Rocks

The twin rocks which are seen on the eastern side, are named after the great Hindu Monk, Swami Vivekananda. During his long travels over India, in the year 1892, the Swamiji, after visiting Rameswaram and Madurai arrived at Cape Comorin, and fell prostrate in ecstasy before the Goddess. Later, seeing the twin rocks, he plunged at once into the ocean to reach them. Around him the waves tossed and splashed but he sat on the rock for a long time in deep meditation. Just a couple of years before, this young monk had wandered in the dense forests of the Himalayas, the crown of our Mother India.

Swamy Vivekananda Rocks



Now he found himself serenely meditating at her feet. He must have thought about his great country and his great but suffering brethern and the ways and means to relieve them. In the succeeding years he was thundering at his Western audiences electrifying them by his dynamic personality. He was the symbol of India's awakened spirituality. No wonder, people think that even the rocks were sanctified by the holy touch of this great soul.

In memory of his visit to the rock, a nine foot Statue, in standing posture, of Swamiji in bronze is to be erected in a memorial building (140′×40′×65′) which is under construction by the Rock Memorial Committee. Another Mandapam around the foot print of Devi Kanyakumari is also being raised. The committee is running a ferry service to the rock for the convenience of the visitors.

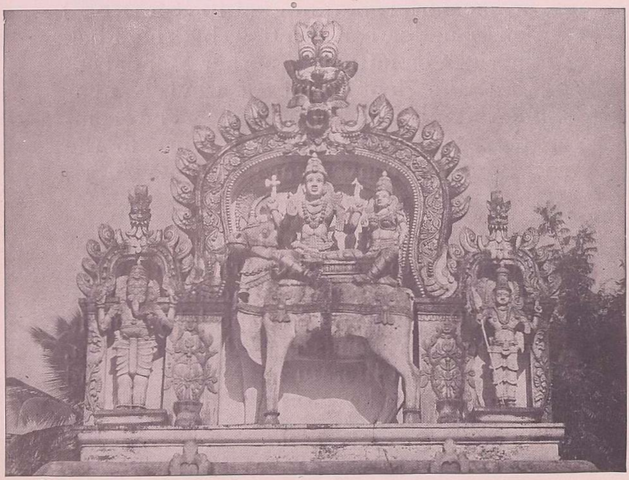
Swami Vivekananda Library

In commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Kanyakumari, a library was instituted by the public. It contains more than 5000 volumes and is specially rich in its collection of books on Hindu religion, philosophy and literature. Mahatmaji and other great men have visited this library and recorded their appreciation in the visitor's book.

Chakra Thirtha

A mile from Kanyakumari to the north on the main road, is the Kasi Viswanatha Temple. It is said in the Sthalapurana, that the Chakra of the Goddess after cutting down the head of Banasura, pierced the earth at this place, bringing forth a fresh water spring. The Viswanatha Temple, the Pathala Ganga near it and the cremation ground on the eastern side remind one of Banaras.

Front View of the Kasi Viswanatha temple, cape comorin



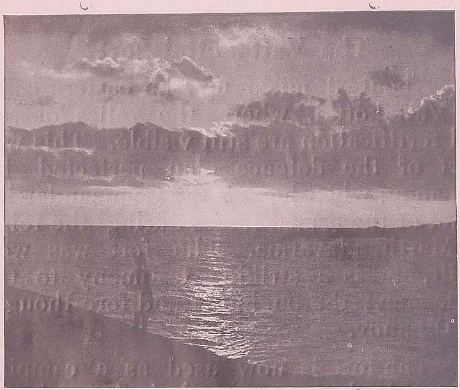
The Vattakottai Fort

About 3 miles up the eastern coast is Vattakottai, where the relics of an old fortification are still visible. This was part of the defence plan perfected by D'Lanoy, when he was the Commander-in-chief of the armed forces during the reign of Marthandavarma. The fort was well built, and is a striking testimony to the efficiency, thoroughness and fore-thought of D'Lanoy.

The fort is now used as a camping ground by boy scouts and picnic parties.

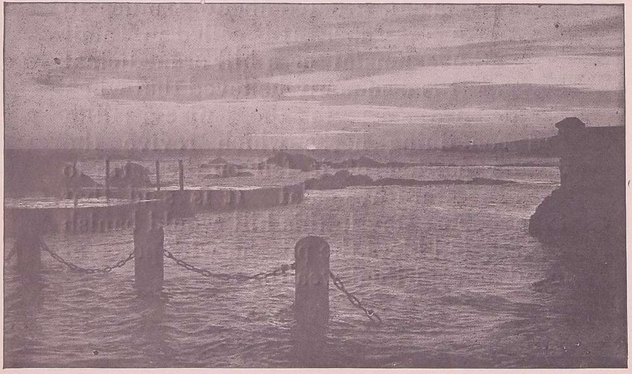
Maruthvamalai

No tourist or pilgrim to Kanyakumari, can afford to miss a visit to the famous Maruthvamalai, situated about 4 miles to the north of Cape. It is called in Tamil Marunthuvazhmalai or a hill of medicinal herbs. It is commonly believed that when Hanuman was carrying the Sanjeevi Hill-a hill containing herbs which revive the dead-a portion of it fell on the earth to form the Maruthvamalai. It is said that even a short stay in this hill would banish disease and bless the pilgrim with peace of mind and spiritual wealth.



Ere the day is done

Sunset



At any place the sight of the sea delights one with a sensitive mind; at Kanyakumari it sends him to raptures. Gazing at the high waves rolling and beating on the multi-coloured sands one wonders whether the waves advance to tell one of the secrets hidden in the mysterious depths of the ocean. One exclaims with a great poet that the foaming waves are trying to adorn the feet of Mother India with silver anklets and not satisfied with their performance they are endlessly repeating it. And the tourist with a religious bent of mind, who takes a bath in the holy waters and worships at the temple where the Virgin Goddess is doing penance, will return home with his mind filled with the "peace that passeth understanding".

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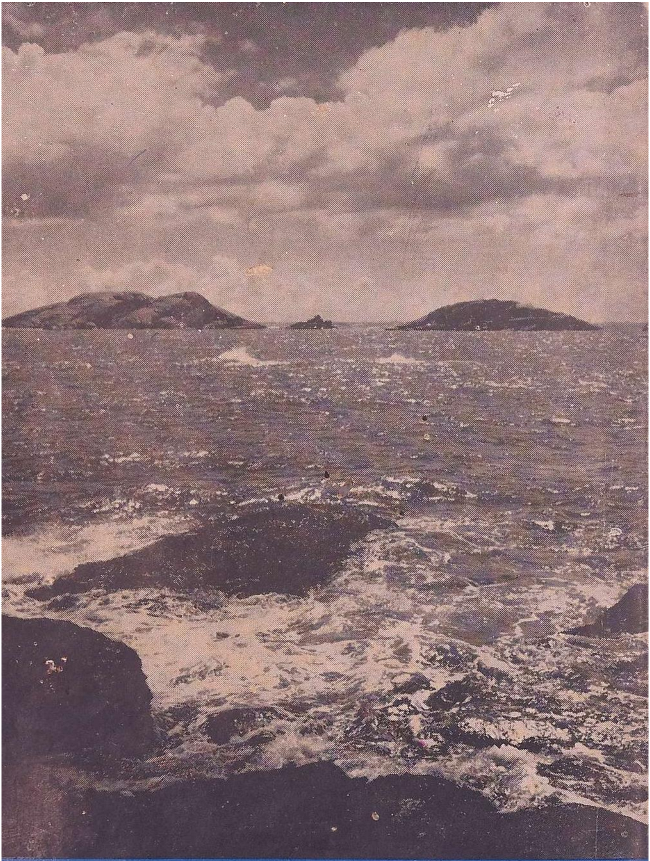

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